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ABSTRACT

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) met with West African Commonwealth countries to furnish participants with information about the reasons for establishment of COL, its objectives, functions, and structure. Participants for the meeting came from The Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria. Opening sessions focused on COL and distance education as the main vehicle for achieving COL's purpose of creation of educational access. Concerns about inadequacy of communications and contacts between African countries were expressed in response to a discussion of COL's use of technology. Participants from Nigeria outlined experiences in distance education, including the Network of Distance Education Institutions; National Teachers Institute, a major provider of distance education; and the University of Abuja with its mandate to provide distance education components for each conventional subject. Participants from The Gambia reported on the new national policy of education, identified teacher training as the most crucial element for its success, and made a strong case for distance education as a support to the literacy campaigns. The Sierra Leone delegation identified problems with teacher education and reported no distance education programs. Conclusions were that COL should assist the countries, there was widespread need for teacher training, and an association of distance education institutions should be established. (Appendixes include minutes of a meeting with the Vice President of The Gambia and the agenda.) (YLB)

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WEST AFRICAN CONSULTATION MEETING

JULY 24 - 28, 1990

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THE COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

CE 061 523

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WEST AFRICAN CONSULTATION MEETING

PURPOSE

The realisation that most Commonwealth countries of the West African sub-region were, for the most part, unaware of the goals and purposes The Commonwealth of Learning, prompted the President of COL to request the President of The Gambia, H.E. Alhaji Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, to host the first consultation meeting between the West Africa Commonwealth countries and The Commonwealth of Learning.

There were four main objectives for convening the meeting:

1. to furnish the participants with information about the reasons for the establishment of The Commonwealth of Learning, its objectives, functions and structure;

2. to exchange information with COL about the status of distance education in the different countries of the sub-region;

3. to discuss ways of facilitating cooperation and communication between West Africa and COL and between Distance Education Institutions in the sub-region;

4. to identify specific areas of need in each country and determine, in general terms, how such needs might be met within each country or through cooperative sub-regional activities.

PARTICIPATION:

The participants for the meeting came from The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. Ghana was unable to send a delegation to the meeting. The following is the list of participants:

The Gambia

1. Mr. Saim M.L. Kinteh
   Director, Non-Formal Education Services
   Ministry of Education

2. Mr. Ebrahim T.A.S. Dondeh
   Director of Technical Education & Vocational Training
   Ministry of Education

3. Mr. Ndondy S.Z. Njie - Leader
   Principal
   The Gambia College

4. Mr. S.M.B. Fye
   Director, Management Development Institute

5. Mr. P.D.A. Taiwo Cole
   The Gambia Technical Training Institute

6. Dr. A.B.S. Taal
   Acting Deputy Permanent Secretary
   Ministry of Education

7. Mr. Brian Barlett
   ODA Adviser on Manpower Development
   (Advisor to The Gambian delegation)

Nigeria

8. Professor Albert Ozigi
   Director, Centre for Distance Learning & Continuing
   Education, University of Abuja

9. Dr. Patrick N. Onyekwere
   Federal Ministry of Education

10. Mrs. O.O. Fagbayi
    Federal Ministry of Education

11. Dr. M.M. Bunza - Leader
    Director
    National Teachers' Institute

Sierra Leone

12. Mr. B.S. Konteh - Leader
    Principal Education Officer
    Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs & Sports

13. Mr. Ajayi Coomber
    Senior Lecturer
    Fourah Bay College

14. Mrs. E.H. Palmer
    Acting Curriculum Coordinator
    National Curriculum Development Centre

The Commonwealth of Learning

15. Dr. James A. Maraj
    President

16. Mr. John Quigley
    Director of Technologies & Communications Development

17. Mr. Hafiz S. Wali
    Director of African Programmes and Information Services

AGENDA

The agenda of the meeting is attached.

CONDUCT OF THE MEETING

July 24, 1990

Opening

In his opening remarks, The President of The Commonwealth of Learning expressed gratitude on behalf of all participants to the Government and people of The Gambia, particularly H.E. the President, for agreeing to host the meeting. He provided a brief background about COL, explaining that its establishment was predicated on the difficulties which arose when developed member nations of the Commonwealth decided to charge students from developing countries economic fees. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Vancouver (1987) agreed to set up an international organisation which would promote human resources development through distance learning methods. Distance education could be regarded as a viable option because no country, developed or developing, could afford the full cost of its education using the conventional methods.

The President also took the opportunity to clarify certain misconceptions about the role of The Commonwealth of Learning by explaining that the organisation was neither a funding or a technical assistance concern. COL was also not established to operate within the framework of Commonwealth institutions. Instead, it was to respond primarily to the requirements of Commonwealth Governments by promoting collaboration, exchange of resources in distance education, and by enhancing the capabilities of institutions to provide better student support services.

The meeting was officially opened by Mrs. Nymassata-Sanneh Bojang, Parliamentary Secretary from the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture, representing H.E. Alhaji Bakary Darbo, The Vice President and Minister of Education of The Gambia. In her speech, Mrs. Bojang warmly welcomed the delegates, and expressed the pleasure of the Government and the people of The Gambia in hosting the Meeting, the first The Commonwealth of Learning was undertaking for Africa. She referred to the importance of new communications technologies as holding great promise for education, and for the training of qualified manpower, especially of teachers which she described as being crucial to the development objectives of The Gambia. Mrs. Bojang

urged the meeting to evolve strategies which "would establish practical guidelines for cooperation in... training among Commonwealth countries."

July 24, 1990 - Morning Session (11.35 - 1.00 am)

After the opening ceremony, the first plenary meeting began at 11.35 am, with the President of COL in the Chair. Dr. Maraj suggested that the conduct of the meeting should be relaxed, informal and frank. He wanted the participants to feel free, at any time, to interject and proffer whatever views and suggestions they might have. After formal introductions, the agenda was adopted.

(NOTE: Substantive discussions were deferred until the afternoon session to enable the COL delegation to attend a meeting (12.00 noon) with Vice President of The Gambia and his officials. A separate document (attachment A) on this meeting is appended to this report.)

Afternoon Session:

The discussions in the afternoon elaborated on the President's opening remarks about the purposes and

functions of the COL. Copies of p.3 of the Memorandum of Understanding showing the objectives of COL were circulated to the delegates. Within the framework of these objectives, the President interpreted COL's mandate as being primarily concerned with creation of educational access to more people in the Commonwealth thereby improving the quality of education. Distance Education was identified as the main, although not the only vehicle, for achieving this purpose. It was generally agreed that considerable materials existed within the Commonwealth. The acquisition and exchange of such materials between countries and institutions were an important aspect of COL's mandate. However, Dr. Maraj distinguished between the existence of the materials and their availability. Copyright laws and the so called "*intellectual property*" syndrome militated against the flow of materials. COL was born into a period when educational services were regarded as commodities to be sold at high prices by many developed Commonwealth countries.

While it was often assumed materials provided by developing nations might not measure up to the "*standards*" of those produced by institutions in the developed countries, their "*quality*" was often not in doubt. Thus a possible way out

of ensuring accessibility to available materials would be to develop south-to-south protocols which would permit transfer of such materials between developing nations at marginal costs. COL was in the process of facilitating such protocols.

To round up the comments about COL and its work, Dr. Maraj asked Mr. John Quigley and Alhaji Hafiz Wali to brief the delegates about various aspects of COL's functional and geographical arrangements and activities.

Mr. John Quigley, Director of Communications and Technology, referred to COL's Memorandum of Understanding and to the importance it attached to the use of modern communications and technology. He warned that although the use of modern technology was a vital component of COL's mandate, technology *per se* was not a panacea to be applied across the board. The realities in various Commonwealth countries called for differentiated strategies to reflect real needs and appropriate activities. COL was approaching the challenges of the use of technology from three perspectives:

1. **Telecommunications** would involve the use of telecommunications for educators and administrators to communicate over distances with institutions, students and among themselves. Telecommunications would also be used to deliver and inform others about courses;

2. **Educational Broadcasting** would include the use of radio and television as teaching tools and also embody the production and distribution of materials for broadcasting;

3. Other forms of technology including more sophisticated electro-mechanical system and information technologies, such as computers. This would include uses of computer software such as word processing, databases and desktop publishing.

The application of one or a combination of these technologies would depend on particular requirements and situations.

Alhaji Hafiz Wali provided details about COL's organisation and structure, and about the COL's information services requirements. He stressed the importance of reliable data

to operations of COL, especially for the Africa region. The main thrusts in this regard included:

1. the establishment of links with Governments, institutions and other relevant organisations to facilitate data collection and validation;

2. the development of the means to store, process and retrieve the data easily and flexibly;

3. the establishment of an information network for dissemination and updating of such information.

Discussions: Concerns were expressed about the inadequacy of communications and contacts between African countries. Agreements between neighbouring states in Africa often failed to materialise due to lack of reliable telecommunications service. It was easier in many instances to establish contacts and start activities with developed countries. Despite such difficulties however, delegates felt that everything must be done to improve matters. African States faced very similar challenges and it would be better if they could share experiences and work out common solutions to their problems. COL's President

indicated willingness to encourage and whenever possible, facilitate such cooperation.

Evening Session:

The Chairman requested the leader of the Nigerian delegation, Dr. Mustafa Bunza, to introduce Nigeria's contribution and to provide the background on various distance activities in Nigeria.

Nigeria

Dr. Bunza first expressed Nigeria's gratitude to COL for affording Nigerian participants the opportunity to attend the meeting. He reiterated Nigeria's interest in and support to COL.

Dr. Bunza said that Nigeria had not prepared a paper for the meeting. He therefore would speak *extempore*. He presented a short outline of Nigeria's past experiences in distance education.

Nigerian universities and institutions had, for decades, provided various types of in-service education. In recent

years, the number of institutions and the range of subjects offered had increased to such a level that the Federal Ministry of Education found it necessary to set up a Network of Distance Education Institutions. Members of the Network met regularly to harmonise the country's distance education activities, and were more recently required to advise on Nigeria's participation in COL's activities. The details of the network arrangement and of other activities would be given by the other participants from Nigeria. Dr. Bunza preferred therefore to brief the meeting about the National Teachers' Institute (NTI).

The National Teachers Institute (NTI) was described as a major provider of distance education. In providing the background of the Institute, Dr. Bunza referred to the UPE (Universal Primary Education) programme which Nigeria embarked upon in 1976. For the programme to succeed, Nigeria needed to train or upgrade over 200,000 teachers. The NTI was established to address this challenge, through the use of distance education methods. The main programmes of the NTI included:

1. Grade II Teachers Certificate courses for the under-qualified and unqualified teachers. Over 186,000 teachers have been trained by NTI since 1984;

2. NTI was also given other assignments including the conduct of examination of Grade II teachers, the teachers' registration exercise and more recently, the conduct of teacher education programmes for the National Certificate of Teachers (NCE).

Discussions: There was a great interest in the NTI programme. The Gambian delegation were interested to study the programme and to determine whether the procedure applied and the courses developed by NTI could be used to advantage in The Gambia. (see 3rd paragraph under The Gambian presentation below)

In his contribution, Prof. Ozigi from the University of Abuja provided a background to educational dev..lopment in Nigeria. He was of the opinion that the agitation for western education grew rapidly in Nigeria because parents associated acquiring western education with job opportunities and prestige for their children. Schools and Universities were established to meet the demand.

Correspondence education courses provided from the UK were popular in the mid-twenties and thirties. Ibadan University was started as a College of the University of London in the mid-forties. Five other universities Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ahmadu Bello University, University of Lagos, University of Nigeria and University of Benin were established in the sixties, but most of 35 universities in Nigeria were started during the oil-boom period. Many Nigerian universities regularly conducted one form of distance education or the other. ABU, for example, had conducted Teacher In-Service Programme for over twenty years.

The University of Abuja was the newest of Nigeria's Universities. The University was mandated to provide distance education component for each conventional subject. It was starting its conventional programmes with four subjects - Law, Social Sciences, Art and Education and had planned to cooperate with other Universities and institutions to develop and maintain its DE component. Workshops for course writers and editors were planned for August 18, at Ahmadu Bello University and at the University of Ilorin. The distance education component was expected to begin by January 1991 with an initial register of about

3,000 candidates. This number was expected to grow to 50,000 in five to six years.

The Nigerian briefing was rounded-up by Mrs. Fagbayi, Assistant Director of Education from the Federal Ministry of Education. She provided more details about the network of distance education institutions which her Ministry had set up. The network was established to provide a forum by which DE institutions would discuss and resolve problems, especially with respect to how Nigeria would plan and benefit from COL's activities. Several meetings of the network had taken place. Priority areas in which Nigeria would seek COL's assistance included:

1) Adult and functional educational programmes;

2) Vocational courses - especially on rural development;

3) Retraining of Science/Maths teachers and Intro-Tech teachers;

4) Upgrading of literacy teachers and supervisors, especially for the nomadic education programme;

5) Computer education programmes;

6) Training of primary Health Care personnel;

7) Improving teaching methodology of University lecturers.

She was hopeful that the meeting would foster closer cooperation with COL and with other sister West African states.

July 25, 1990

Morning Session:

(NOTE: The Sierra Leone delegation, that had arrived the previous evening, joined the meeting. They were warmly welcomed by the Chairman and the other participants.)

The Gambia

The Chairman called on the leader of The Gambia delegates, Mr. N.S.Z. Njie, to introduce the brief on The Gambia. Mr. Njie, the Principal of The Gambia College, speaking on

behalf of the Ministry of Education, reported that The Gambian Government had embarked on a new national policy of education which envisaged a six-year primary education, followed by a three-year middle school and a three-year senior secondary school. The policy programme was designed to span fifteen years.

Teacher training was again identified as the most crucial element for the success of the policy. Mr. Njie reported that 60 per cent of the teachers in the primary school were unqualified and that some 50 per cent of the teachers in the secondary and technical schools were similarly unqualified or underqualified.

The Gambia College was established with the assistance from IMF and entrusted with the training of The Gambia's teachers, nurses and agricultural personnel. The College regularly conducted in-service courses to upgrade teachers. However The Gambia did not have the expertise to develop distance education packages. That was why Mr. Njie was encouraged by what he learned about the NTI programme. The Government of The Gambia believed that Distance Education would provide excellent means for retraining teachers and other professional personnel.

On technology, Mr. Njie disclosed that The Gambia did not operate an educational radio broadcast, again because of the expense and the lack of expertise. He would like The Gambia to benefit from the experience of the other West African countries, particularly Nigeria.

The other participants from The Gambia took turns to complete the presentation on The Gambia. The Director of the Gambia Institute for Management Education, Mr. S.M.B. Fye, stated that Management Education in the country was aimed at raising the level management "skills and consciousness". He was not sure how distance education techniques would apply to management studies because the discipline dealt "with group dynamics, and teaching was best done on a one-to-one relationship". The Institute however could use radio broadcasts to buttress its work and cover a wider audience.

Mr. Kinteh, Director in Ministry for Non-formal and Adult Education, made a strong case for support to the literacy campaigns. The Gambia's illiteracy ratio was 75%, yet only .5m delasis was budgeted for Adult and Non-formal education out 60m delasis voted for education. Texts to sustain

literacy after it had been acquired were not available. The national radio did not reach the interior, although cassettes were often produced and played to groups. Libraries were needed, however, it was difficult to determine where to locate them. He would like to see substantial assistance to aid The Gambia in its literacy efforts.

Speaking on the programmes of The Gambian Technical Institute (GTI), Mr. Taiwo Cole, the Principal, said that the GTI was established in 1983 to meet the middle manpower needs of the country. It conducted courses in motor mechanics, metal machining, carpentry and computer studies at City & Guilds of London level. In order to extend its services, students were encouraged to work in local workshops while receiving theoretical and technical support from the Institute. The Institute had grown in student population (not in facilities) from 120 full-time and 200 part-time when it started to 1,000 full-time and over 1,000 part-time.

July 26, 1990

Sierra Leone

The spokesman for Sierra Leone stated that his country also faced problems with teacher education and with about the same percentage of unqualified and underqualified teachers. The Sierra Leone provided two levels of certification for its teachers - the Sierra Leone Teacher's Certificate and the Higher College Certificate. The Sierra Leone had one University which comprised three colleges and three off-campus institutes affiliated to it.

There were no distance education programmes, but the activities of the Institute of Extra Mural Studies and Adult Education were relevant. This Institute operated under the Ministry of Education's Adult Education Unit had, in the past, organised adult functional programmes for community workers in many towns and villages in the Sierra Leone. The activities of this Institute were run through community centres in the towns. Teachers were often used as instructors. Thus, the instruction provided was always face-to-face.

Sierra Leone also expressed very keen interest to develop distance education programmes for teachers and would like to benefit from the experience of NTI in Kaduna.

July 26 - 27, 1990

Conclusion

Extensive discussions were held on ways and means of improving contacts between the countries of the region and COL, and on cooperation between the states of the sub-region. During the discussions the following conclusions were reached:

1) COL should assist individual countries to improve their educational operations and services. COL should also support cooperation between the nations of the region;

2) there was wide-spread need for the training and retraining of teachers in each of the three West African countries;

3) since Nigeria had considerable experience in this area, it would be advantageous if the other countries benefitted from its experience;

4) in order to facilitate exchange of information, it might be advisable to establish an association of distance education institutions. Nigeria proposed the establishment of the West African Distance Education Association (WADEA).

Following on these observations:

1) COL agreed to sponsor three officials each from The Gambia and Sierra Leone and possibly Ghana to visit NTI facilities to study the methods that it had employed, and to see whether the materials produced would be relevant to the situation in their respective countries;

2) COL agreed to the idea of the establishment of the West African Distance Education Association (WADEA). It was however observed that such an activity must first originate from the nations of the region themselves;

3) With respect to the national programmes:

a) The Gambia:

i) After intensive discussions with the Minister of Education and his officials regarding The Gambia's special requirements and after a visit to The Gambia College site at Brikima, it was agreed that COL would support the development of The Gambia College. Specifically, COL will cooperate with the government in its proposals to upgrade The Gambia College into a College of Higher Education, through the use of distance education methods and by offering some subjects using distance education.

ii) COL would be willing to make a consultant available to the Government of The Gambia who would work with the staff of the College to produce a proposal for the upgrading of the College.

iii) COL will explore the possibility of linking The Gambia and Nigeria using the VITA Satellite System;

iv) COL will also assist The Gambia with the Low Power (FM Radio) system to facilitate contact between The Gambia College with the interior of the country.

b) Sierra Leone:

i) Sierra Leone, like The Gambia, accepted to use distance education methods to upgrade its teachers using Distance Education methods. However, the Ministry would first identify a College which would serve as the Centre for its distance education activity.

c) Nigeria:

i) Since the team from COL will be visiting Nigeria immediately after the meeting in Banjul, the activities to be undertaken by COL in that country would be discussed in Nigeria.

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ATTACHMENT A

THE MEETING WITH H.E., THE VICE PRESIDENT AND MINISTER OF EDUCATION FOR THE GAMBIA

Date: July 24, 1990

Venue: Office of the Vice President of The Gambia

Time: 12.30 - 2.00 p.m.

H.E., The Vice President of The Gambia, Alhaji Bakary Darbo, invited the President of The Commonwealth of Learning and his delegation to a special meeting in his office with Senior Officials from the Ministry of Education. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss his country's requirements in greater detail and to exchange views with the President of COL and his entourage about how The Gambia would approach the challenges it was facing.

Introducing the subject, H.E. Alhaji Bakary Darbo explained his vision of what education should be like for his country. Since his assumption of duty as the Minister in charge of Education, he had found the challenges facing his country to be so great and that new ways and better methods must be found to address the problems of providing

education. The Gambia faced overwhelming demands for education at a period of dwindling resources. He personally would like to see more use made of distance education techniques to resolve the situation, but The Gambia did not have the experience to develop a viable distance education system. It required expertise in course materials development and production techniques.

A major area of concern was teacher education because majority of the teachers were not qualified to teach. The Gambia operated only one teachers' college and therefore all higher education for its citizens was provided outside. He himself was trained at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The Government had recently originated proposals to develop The Gambia College into an institution of higher education. That was why he was very happy to interact with the President of an organisation which had Commonwealth-wide mandate to respond to the educational needs of member countries.

Replying, the President of COL assured the Vice President that The Commonwealth of Learning would only be too happy to assist The Gambia in its plans to improve the quality of education in its country, specifically by upgrading The

Gambia College. He supported the idea of using distance education because of the advantages derivable from its methods, techniques and benefits. For example, distance education was more cost effective and when properly organised, more efficient than a conventional system. He suggested that COL could assist The Gambia College and to offer tertiary distance education courses and offered to send a consultant to The Gambia to assist in determining the nature of assistance.

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WEST AFRICAN CONSULTATION MEETING
AGENDA
JULY 24 - JULY 28

DAY 1 - TUESDAY, JULY 24

Time	Details
10.00 - 10.30 a.m.	Opening remarks by the President of The Commonwealth of Learning
10.30 - 11.00 a.m.	Address by HE The Vice President and Minister of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture
11.00 a.m.	Coffee Break
11.30 a.m. - 12 noon	Discusson on and adoption of the Agenda
12 noon - 1.00 p.m.	A discussion on COL: its aims and objectives, its organisation and structure. A more detailed brief the President of COL, assisted by Mr. John Quigley and Hafiz Wali
1.00 - 2.30 p.m.	Lunch
2.30 - 5.00 p.m.	Afternoon Session
	Perspectives and comments on the morning session.

DAY 2, WEDNESDAY, JULY 25

Time	Details
10.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m.	Morning Session Discussions on country issues: a) The Gambia b) Ghana
1.00 - 2.30 p.m.	Lunch
2.30 - 5.00 p.m.	Afternoon Session c) Nigeria d) Sierra Leone
6.30 - 7.30 p.m.	Reception by the Ministry of Education

DAY 3, THURSDAY, JULY 26

Time	Details
9.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m.	Morning Session National Priorities based on the following aspects of The Commonwealth of Learning's mandate: a) Training b) Material Acquisition and Development c) Information Services d) Use of Modern Technology e) Continuing Professional Education f) Any other relevant topics
1.00 - 3.00 p.m.	Lunch
3.00 - 5.00 p.m.	Afternoon Session Continue with morning session.

DAY 4, FRIDAY, JULY 27

Time	Details
9.00 a.m. - 12 noon	Morning Session Regional Priorities and Coordination
12 noon - 1.30 p.m.	Lunch
1.30 - 2.30 p.m.	Closing ceremony by HE The Vice President
2.30 - 6.30 p.m.	Free
6.30 p.m.	Dinner - hosted by The Commonwealth of Learning.

DAY 5, SATURDAY, JULY 28

To be determined	Visit to Brikama College

Note: All delegates will leave on Sunday, July 29.